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FACT SHEET

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Resource Allocation Study

The Resource Allocation Study (RAS) was conducted to help identify courts with the greatest funding need. The study was directed by the Office of Court Research (OCR) and consultants from the National Center for State Courts. The Resource Allocation Study Working Group, comprised of the executive officers of sixteen courts participating in the study, provided oversight and guidance for the project. In addition, OCR staff worked in close collaboration with the Finance Division to ensure that the RAS model could be used for allocation purposes. The Judicial Council first approved the RAS methodology at its meeting on July 25, 2005. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2005–06, the RAS was used to augment the baseline budgets of 28 courts with the greatest funding need by a total of almost \$14 million. It was again approved for FY2006–07 and FY2007–08. For FY2006–07, the RAS was used to allocate resources to 18 courts with the greatest funding need by a total of approximately \$5 million. And, for FY2007–08, the RAS was used to allocate resources to 26 courts with the greatest funding need by a total of approximately \$12 million. To date, approximately \$31 million has been allocated to those courts with the greatest funding need. Future work on the RAS will seek to incorporate measures of performance into the evaluation of workload.

Why are uniform measures of staff workload needed?

Prior to state funding of the trial courts the effects of resource allocation across courts were largely disconnected from one another. With the bulk of trial court funding coming from county governments, local funding of the trial courts made it possible for one court to receive additional funding without having any implications for the amount of funding available to another court.

The advent of state funding made it necessary for the California State Judiciary to begin evaluating its priorities as a branch. The Lockyer-Isenberg Trial Court Funding Act of 1997 points out that state funding “is necessary to provide uniform standards

and procedures, economies of scale and structural efficiency and simplification.” Achieving these goals, however, involves making difficult choices regarding scarce resources. In order to assist branch leaders in documenting the resource needs of the courts and prioritizing resource decisions, the Office of Court Research (OCR) was directed to develop measures of workload that provide a single yardstick against which all trial courts may be evaluated.

The benefits of establishing uniform measures of workload go beyond assisting the Judicial Council in prioritization of funding decisions. In addition, using uniform measures of workload can also create of a more predictable and transparent fiscal environment. With a workload model in place, court executives know well in advance what the formulas are for evaluating funding needs and can devote their resources to managing their operations rather than writing budget change proposals.

How does the RAS model estimate workload?

At first glance the superior courts of the State of California may appear to operate very differently across county boundaries. The legacy of local funding, different local court cultures, different mixes of cases, technology, even geography all contribute to unique conditions in the trial courts.

A closer look at the operations of the courts, however, reveals more similarities than differences. Indeed, a preliminary evaluation of trial court expenditures and filings’ data revealed that aggregate filings in the trial courts are strongly, positively correlated with expenditures. Identification of the relationship between filings and expenditures provided the foundation for developing case weights to distinguish among cases with different amounts of workload required for their processing.

Further research was conducted to validate the findings of the financial analysis. A representative sample of nine courts participated in a time study to evaluate how much time staff spend processing different types of cases. The findings from the time study confirmed the findings of the evaluation of expenditures and filings and provided preliminary case weights for seven categories of filings.

Further research was then conducted with the original nine time-study courts and an additional seven courts that formed the Resource Allocation Study Working Group. Staff from these courts participated in a detailed evaluation of all of the tasks involved in the processing of fifteen distinct case types to refine the original seven case weights. Further refinements of the model involved separating the work of courtroom staff from that of other case processing staff and creating adjustments to take into account large filings fluctuations in the smallest courts.

For purposes of the budget allocation process, the model also had to be augmented to incorporate the full range of staff in the trial courts, including supervisors, managers and administrative staff. These staff were incorporated into the model using positions (Schedule 7A) data and were calculated according to the different size groupings into which the courts can be organized. Courts were divided into four clusters of comparable sized courts. These clusters were also used in the allocation process to evaluate relative funding need.

The final recommendation of the Resource Allocation Study Working Group, approved by the Judicial Council at its business meeting on July 25, 2005 was to:

“Approve the Resource Allocation Study model methodology for purposes of allocating resources on the basis of workload with the understanding that on-going technical adjustments will be made by AOC staff as the data become available.”

The 28 courts receiving augmentations to their baseline budgets beginning in Fiscal Year 2005-06 as a result of the RAS include:

Cluster 1: Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, Glenn, Inyo, Lassen, Mariposa, Modoc, San Benito, and Trinity.

Cluster 2: Kings, Imperial, Lake, Madera, Merced, Placer, Shasta, Sutter, Tehama, Yolo, and Yuba.

Cluster 3: Fresno, Monterey, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare.

Cluster 4: San Bernardino and Riverside.

What are the next steps for this project?

While the RAS makes it possible to identify the courts with the most severe resource needs, the Judicial Council also made it clear that there is more work to be done. Specifically the council directed staff to continue work on this project to incorporate measures of performance into the model and to verify and improve the accuracy of the data used in the model. Office of Court Research staff will continue working with the Resource Allocation Study Working Group as it begins evaluating performance measures and seeks to incorporate these into the RAS model.

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